

Bostwick Hall
Bladensburg, Maryland

Prince George's

HABS No.

MD-615

HABS

MD.

17. BLAD

1.

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Washington, D.C.

Historic American Buildings Survey
Delos H. Smith, District Officer
1707 Eye St., N.W., Washington, D.C.

Addendum To:
BOSTWICK HALL
(Christopher Lowndes House)
3901 48th Street
Bladensburg
Prince Georges County
Maryland

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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

BOSTWICK HALL
(Christopher Lowndes House)

HABS NO. MD-615

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17-BLAD,
1-

Location: 3901 48th Street, Bladensburg, Prince George's County, Maryland

Present Owner: Mrs. Susanna Cristofane (also current occupant)

Present Use: Private residence

Significance: Bostwick is one of the first, and one of the few extant, structures built in Bladensburg upon its founding in 1742. Only four pre-Revolutionary War buildings now stand. Although altered over the years, it was one of the grandest homes constructed in the county during this period of early settlement. It is also of significance as the home of Christopher Lowndes, a merchant and manufacturer and one of Bladensburg's most prominent citizens. It was also the home of Benjamin Stoddert, who served as Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Navy.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Bostwick was constructed in 1746. This date is given on a wrought lead plaque mounted on the south chimney block, which reads, "C.L. 1746."

2. Original and subsequent owners: Bostwick has been the home of only three different families over the past 244 years. The original owner/builder was Christopher Lowndes and his wife, Elizabeth Tasker Lowndes. Following the death of Mr. Lowndes, Bostwick passed to his daughter Rebecca, wife of Benjamin Stoddert. Rebecca passed away in 1802 and Benjamin lived out the rest of his life here, dying in 1813.

Bostwick was purchased by Judge John Stephen in 1822, passing to his son, Nicholas Carroll Stephen, upon the judge's death in 1844. Nicholas in turn passed Bostwick on to his daughter, Julianna, and her husband, Jules Dieudonne after his death in 1881. The Dieudonnes defaulted on the mortgage, loosing the house in 1891.

It was purchased in 1904 by James H. Kyner and is now the property of his daughter, Susanna Christofane.

3. Builder, supplier, contractor: The house was built for Christopher Lowndes. As an importer of building supplies (among other things), and a building contractor himself, Lowndes probably served as his own supplier and contractor. He is documented as the builder of another county landmark, St. Barnabus Church, in the 1770s.

4. Original plans and construction: The original structure consisted of the current main block only. The kitchen wing to the north and certain features of the main block, such as the front porch, dormers, replacement windows, dentil modling, were added later. Historic photographs (in possession of current owner) show that the facade once had a pavilion front entry, and quoining to either side of the entry.

5. Alterations and additions: The the main structure of the house was built in the 18th-century, although a number of changes have taken place. The Stodderts, who owned the house from 1785 to 1813, are attributed with adding the buttress at the south side and the kitchen building to the northeast. The windows were evidently changed at some point from what would have been smaller, many-paned, mid-18th century windows to larger, six-over-six sash windows, and dormers added. Extensive changes were made in the first decade of the 20th century, to the then decrepit dwelling. A one-story, gable-front vestibule then located at the front entry of the house was removed, as were quoins to either side of the doorway. The porch along the front was added and the rear porch rebuilt. The windows on the front of the first story were enlarged and stained glass added, and a Palladian window was added to the rear to light the library. New doorways with sidelights were added to the front and rear. Interior changes included the following: a new stairway replaced the original, steep stairs with winders; an archway in the stairhall was added; and a decorative, wainscot with incised floral patterns-- a lincrusta or linoleum-like wall covering-- was added in the stairhall and library.

B. Historical Context:

Bostwick is among the first structures built in the town of Bladensburg, and one of the only historic buildings to survive. Bladensburg was founded by an act of assembly in 1742 in an effort to encourage trade in Prince George's County. Its location along the Anacostia

River (filled-in with silt and thus unnavigable since the mid-19th century) made it an ideal location for a town site. Bladensburg did, in fact, become one of the most active ports in Maryland, being one of the ports through which goods from abroad were imported and Prince Georges' tobacco was exported. Much of the county's export tobacco, its primary agricultural product, would have come through Bladensburg. Thus, one of the original seven tobacco warehouse and inspection stations was located in here.

Christopher Lowndes, one of the leading merchants of Bladensburg, immigrated here originally in order to establish trade rights along the Anacostia for the British firm of Henry & Edward Trafford of Liverpool. Later, Lowndes established his own trading company, importing spices, building supplies, dry goods and even slaves. He owned a shipyard where the construction of ocean-going vessels was undertaken. Lowndes also operated a rope-walk for the manufacture of cordage necessary for ships lines. through these endeavors, Lowndes amassed quite a fortune. In addition to his mercantile interests, Lowndes was also appointed Commissioner of the town of Bladensburg in 1745, and was a Prince George's County Justice. He served both these positions until his death in 1785. He also served as a building contractor and is documented as having built St. Barnabus Church, Leeland vic. of Prince George's County (Wright pgs 34-38 & Wilfong, News Leader).

The Town Records of Bladensburg recorded the sale of lot #52 to Christopher Lowndes in 1742, the year the town was founded. Bostwick, named for his family home in Cheshire, England, was completed by the time the Town Commissioners inspected his lot on the 5th of June 1746. Lowndes also acquired surrounding lots #53, #46 & #16. Then, on the 19th of May, 1747, he married Elizabeth Tasker, daughter of Hon. Benjamin Tasker, Esq. Together, they had nine children (Ibid.).

After Christopher Lowndes's death in 1785, Bostwick became the property of his daughter Rebecca, as stipulated by his will (Lowndes had built fine homes for a number of his other children). Rebecca had married Benjamin Stoddert in 1781. They lived in his home "Halycon House" in Georgetown. Stoddert had served as a captain in the Revolutionary War and was then a partner in a firm involved in the tobacco trade. In 1798 Stoddert was appointed first Secretary of the Navy by President John Adams, and served that position through

BOSTWICK HALL
(Christopher Lowndes House)
HABS NO. MD-615 (page 4)

Adams's term. Stoddert also served as Secretary of War. Afterwards, they left Georgetown for Bladensburg and Bostwick (Owens, & Wright).

The Stodderts made a number of changes, including the construction of the (separate) kitchen building with rooms above and the addition of the buttress which both secured the cracking wall and provided holding cells for unruly slaves (according to a letter from Stoddert in possession of current owner). Rebecca passed away in 1802 and Benjamin in 1813.

In 1822 Bostwick was purchased by Judge John Stephen, a lawyer and member of the Governor's Council. He served as Judge of the Maryland Court of Appeals between 1822 and the time of his death in 1844. His wife was the daughter of Col. James Brice of Annapolis. Bostwick remained in the family for many years, passing to their son, Nicholas Carroll Stephen, after his father's death in 1844, and then to Nicholas' daughter, Julianna Dieudonne, after his death in 1881. Her husband, Jules, was an artist and painted the murals which appear in Bostwick. They lost the property, however, in 1891 after defaulting on the mortgage (Owens, and Equity #2546).

Bostwick was purchased by Mr. & Mrs. James H. Kyner in 1904. The Kyners made extensive repairs and changes to the house, giving its more simple mid-18th century design an updated, early 20th-century look. Colonial revival ornamentation, most clearly visible in the large porch which runs the length of the facade, and the new, large windows in the front of the first story, and the Palladian window to the rear, were added. Numerous changes were made to the interior as well, including a new stairway, ornamental wall treatment (which appears to be Lincrusta, an embossed linoleum-like wallcovering first developed in 1877) and numerous details.

Mr. Kyner made his fortune in the railroads, determining the particular needs for a new line and estimating cost. He was an adventurous man who made his fortune once in railroading, lost it in mine speculation, went out west and made it, again in railroading. From his trips out west he brought back elk and deer heads (still mounted on the walls of Bostwick) and bear skins from his hunts. He also served in the Civil War, during which time he lost a leg. He came to Maryland from the west coast with his second wife and purchased Bostwick from a real estate agent in 1904. Upon the death of him and his wife, Bostwick was inherited by their daughter and only child,

Susanna, the wife of Felix E. Cristofane. It remains in her possession today (info. on Kyner from interview with Susanna Cristofane).

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Bostwick is an early Georgian-style house updated near the turn of the century with Colonial Revival details such as the porches, windows, fanlight and frontispiece. Its early Georgian form has almost a Postmedieval English look, of the southern tradition, with its high pitched, flaring, gable roof with ornamental end chimneys. An historic photograph shows a single story, brick pavilion front entry (also a feature of southern Postmedieval, English architecture). In fact, Christopher Lowndes English heritage may have flavored his American Georgian residence.

2. Condition of the fabric: Bostwick appears to be in good condition. A number of its original distinguishing details were, however, replaced, largely during the turn of the century.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Bostwick has a huge main block, two-and-a-half stories high (dormers added later), five-bays-by-two-bays with front and rear porches running the length of the facades. At the north side is a one-and-a-half story, two-bay wide wing. To the rear of this is a detached kitchen building. At the south side is a large, brick buttress running from the ground to mid-second story.

2. Foundations: The foundations are masonry with a overcoat of plaster.

3. Walls: The walls are of brick laid in a Flemish bond (now painted pale yellow). A three-brick belt course runs between the first and second stories, and a single belt course runs between the second and third stories on the gable ends, to the cornice line, front and rear. In addition to the large buttress added at the south side, a number of small buttresses appear on the south wall of the southwest corner of the main block, and on the west wall, of the northwest corner of the north wing). In

BOSTWICK HALL
(Christopher Lowndes House)
HABS NO. MD-615 (page 6)

addition to buttresses, tie-rods have been added for support of the structure. They are punctuated with iron stars which appear between each story at the south wall, towards the front.

4. Structural system, framing: Bostwick is of load-bearing masonry construction.

5. Porches: An elaborate Colonial Revival style porch now runs the length of the west, front facade (added by Kyner ca. 1904). It has a low hip roof with a pedimented gable projecting from the center. The pediment has a recessed sunburst pattern and is lined around the inside with dentil molding. Fluted Ionic columns support the roof and the molded, denticulated frieze, with a balustrade with turned balusters. On the west front of the north wing, a porch covering the two bays has a low hip roof supported by three box columns with pilasters. There is a balustrade with squared, molded cap newels at the entry. There is also a porch which runs the length of the east, rear elevation (reconstructed from the existing porch, by Kyner ca. 1904).

6. Chimneys: There are decorative, interior brick chimneys at each gable end of the main block. The chimneys are narrow and T-shaped, with the stem of the T to the inside, and rise high above the roof-line. They have corbelled caps and a recessed, arched panel along the outside. At the top of the arch at the south side chimney reads, "CL 1746." There is an interior chimney at the gable end of the north wing, and on the east wall of the kitchen building.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: Bostwick has entries at the center of both the front (west) and rear (east) walls (both with replacement surrounds ca. 1904). The front entry has an elaborate frontispiece with a full elliptical fanlight, and a double row of sidelights (6 x 2 lights) flanked by pilasters. The door is wooden with glass panes in the upper portion. The rear entry has the same door and double row of sidelights, but not the elaborate frontispiece and fanlight. The entry is slightly recessed with a wooden architrave lintel. The entry at the west front of the north wing, is a simple, unornamented doorway with a wooden door with glass panes in the top portion. The entry to the kitchen building has an unornamented, narrow wooden

BOSTWICK HALL
(Christopher Lowndes House)
HABS NO. MD-615 (page 7)

surround, with brick lintel above and a vertical board door.

b. Windows: The first story of the west front is lit by large twenty-five-over-twenty-light sash windows with single light transoms above. The other windows are large, four-over-four-light sash windows, except for the gable ends which have six-over-six-light sash windows. There is a Palladian window at the first story, rear elevation. All the above are replacements, ca. 1904. The one-and-a-half story north wing is lit by six-over-six-light sash windows. The windows are surrounded by simple stepped molding. There are no lintels visible as the windows of the front and rear run into the porch roof and cornice line. At the side elevation, the windows are narrower. There is an round-arched brick lintel at the first story, south side window towards the front only.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The main block has a steeply pitched gable roof with a slight flare at the eaves. The north wing has a plain gable roof. The roofs are covered with composition shingles.

b. Cornice, eaves: There is an elaborate cornice along the west front and east rear walls. There is a wide frieze with a strip of molding through the center, and scroll brackets. Large brackets and running the length of the frieze are spaced with two smaller brackets between. They support an overhanging, narrow boxed cornice. The north wing has a plain frieze board.

c. Dormers: There are three dormers at the west front elevation of the roof, and two at the east rear (added pre-1904). At the front elevation, the dormer to the center is larger with narrow round-arched windows to either side. All three windows are round-arched. The one to the center has two-over-two-light vertical sashes with a muntin across the top of the upper sash. The side windows are one-over-one-light sash with a muntin across the top of the upper sash. The center dormer has a low gable front roof with a narrow boxed return. The other two dormers, one to either side, also have a low gable-front roof with a narrow boxed return, but have regular six-over-six-light sash windows. At

the rear elevation there are two of the smaller type of dormers only, spaced as they are on the front.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. First floor: The main block has a center hall plan, with one large room to the south and two rooms to the north, and a kitchen wing to the north of it. The stairhall, to the center, runs the depth of the house, with an entry at either end, front and rear. The stair is along the north wall. Along the south wall of the hall are two doorways, both into the large parlor which also runs the depth of the house. Across from the front doorway into the parlor is the doorway into the dining room. This room adjoins the library to the rear of it with a large pilastered doorway. At the northwest corner of the dining room is a doorway into the kitchen (wing). Behind the main stairway is an entry from the hall into the library.

b. Second floor: The second floor follows the same basic plan. The stairway enters into a large hall which runs the depth of the house. Over the large parlor are two bedrooms, each with a corner fireplace (back to back above the huge living room fireplace). There is a bedroom over each the dining room and the library. There are two more bedrooms over the kitchen.

2. Stairways: The stairway in the center hall of the main block was built in the early-20th century to replace the original which was a steep stair with winders. The open-string, two-run stair rises 16 steps to the landing and again rises at 180 degrees. The stair continues up to the third floor. It is Colonial Revival in detailing, with a molded handrail, squared, recessed panel newel post, with square cap, and squared balusters, three per step.

3. Flooring: The floors on the first story are hardwood with a slight beveled edge (not original).

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls in the large parlor have paneled wainscoting with larger panels above, separated by heavy, segmental molding. Currently there is currently floral wallpaper on the face of each panel. In the dining room there is paneled, walnut wainscoting

with a elaborate chair rail consisting of a wide band flanked with molding. In the center hall, stairway and library, a decorative wainscoting-like wall treatment was added. It appears to be lincrusta, a linoleum-like wallcovering first invented by Frederick Walton in 1877. Used extensively in halls and stairways due to its durability, it forms a texture, leather-like surface which has been incised with large floral designs, with small knob-like projections below the chair rail. There is a heavy molded cornice in the center hall, dining room and library. In the parlor is a simpler scotia molding.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The doorways have stepped architrave trim with paneled reveals which match the six-panel, cross-and-open-bible doors. The elliptical arched doorway to the rear of the stairhall, near the back entry, is supported by panelled pilasters. There is a large squared doorway between the dining room and library, flanked by fluted pilasters supporting a denticulated architrave, with panelled reveals.

b. Windows: The windows, like the doorways, have stepped architrave surrounds. They are splayed, with paneled reveals.

6. Decorative features and trim: There are a number of decorative mantels. The mantel in the parlor is a mid-19th-century Federal-style mantel with a shouldered architrave surround flanked by fluted columns. The mantel shelf steps out over the columns with crenelated molding beneath the shelf. It ornaments a large fireplace opening, the block of which protrudes into the room.

The Federal-style mantel in the library is flanked by free-standing, tapering Ionic columns. The wide frieze has a lamp and swag pattern to the center with an oval medallion over each of the columns.

In the dining room is a marble, victorian-style mantel with a round-arched opening, with molded spandrels, topped with a cartouche, and flanked with ornamental, scroll-bracketed pilasters. The fireplaces in the second story have plain mantles.

The large, corner china cabinet in the dining room (added by Kyner) has double, ten-light doors in the top portion,

BOSTWICK HALL
(Christopher Lowndes House)
HABS NO. MD-615 (page 10)

and in the bottom are three drawers with a double-door cabinet below. It has a dentilled architrave top. Over each doorway in the parlor are panels painted with landscape scenes by Jules Dieudonne, painter and resident during the late-19th century.

7. Hardware: There are box locks on some of the interior doors.

8. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating: The house is heated by decoratively cast radiators. The one in the dining room has a bun warmer.

b. Lighting: There are crystal chandeliers in the center hall and dining room.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Bostwick sits atop a terraced hill, facing west onto 48th Street, with Quincy Street passing to the south. Bostwick is approached by a long driveway south of the house. The site is within the town of Bladensburg, just one block from Annapolis Road and Kennilworth Avenue, both busy commercial strips, yet its large town lot separates it from town development.

2. Historic landscape design: Bostwick, when constructed, overlooked the old port of Bladensburg. From his home, Christopher Lowndes could view his waterfront business and shipyard. Bostwick sits on a knoll, the most prominent site in the town. The front lawn of Bostwick has been terraced with steps, a walkway, and a concrete retaining wall near the house (probably during the early-20th century). A number of large, old trees surround the immediate area around the house and the periphery of the yard, leaving the terraced front clear.

3. Outbuildings: To the rear northeast corner of the house is the original brick kitchen building. It was later used as a wood house when the current kitchen wing was added, and is now used as living quarters. To the southeast rear is a grouping of late-19th to early-20th century outbuildings. There is a board-and-batten two-car garage with a gable front roof and large sliding doors. Near it to the south is a two-story, board-and-batten, gambrel-roofed barn with a porte cochere to its

BOSTWICK HALL
(Christopher Lowndes House)
HABS NO. MD-615 (page 11)

north front. It has large sliding barn doors, and single-story, board-and-batten sheds attached to either end. To the east of these is another, two-story, gambrel-roofed barn building. Also connected historically to Bostwick is the market master's house, to the northwest of Bostwick, off 48th Street (see HABS No. MD-615-C).

PART IV. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early Views: In the possession of the current owner are a number of historic views which were reportedly taken by the real estate agent that sold Bostwick to the owner's father in 1904. Both the front and rear of the building, then in need of repair, are shown. Bostwick was also photographed by HABS photographer John O. Brostrup on April 30, 1936. Three views were taken, from the northwest of the front showing the house, retaining wall and terracing; from the southeast showing the buttressed side and rear elevations; and from the east of the rear elevation.

B. Interviews: Interview with Susanna Yatman, daughter of the current owner (by Catherine C. Lavoie, HABS historian), November 1, 1989. The interview mainly concerned changes made to the house by her grandfather, James H. Kyner, in 1904. Mr. Kyner made extensive changes to the house which was then in poor condition, updating it with Colonial Revival details of the early-20th century.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Owens, Christopher (M-NCPHC historian). National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form for Bostwick, prepared September 1974.

Prince Georges County Land Records, County Courthouse, various deeds as cited in text.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Wilfong, James C., Jr. "River House" (Prince Georges County) News-Leader, 30 June 1955.

Ibid. title unknown, The Enquirer-Gazette, 12 September 1968.

BOSTWICK HALL
(Christopher Lowndes House)
HABS NO. MD-615 (page 12)

Wright, Catherine. "Port of Bladensburg," Printed
Friends of Sister Catherine, 1977 (located in
the Maryland Room, Hyattsville Library).

Prepared by: Catherine C. Lavoie
Historian
March 1990

PART V. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Documentation of Bostwick was undertaken as part of a cooperative project between the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and the Maryland National Capital Park & Planning Commission on behalf of the Prince Georges County Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to document select sites throughout the county. A memorandum of agreement was signed in August of 1988 and the project, to span one year, began in January of 1989. Gail Rothrock, director, and Susan G. Pearl, research historian (HPC), made the selection of sites. They also provided access to their research and information on file with the HPC, as well as their extensive knowledge of the county's history. The large format photography was undertaken by HABS photographer Jack E. Boucher. The historical report was prepared by HABS historian Catherine C. Lavoie who also accompanied the photographer into the field for on-site investigation and architectural description.